



# IRAQ INVASION

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## Bin Laden couldn't have asked for more

THE GUARDIAN, London

Osama bin Laden, in his wildest dreams, could hardly have hoped for this. A mere 18 months after he boosted the US to a peak of worldwide sympathy unprecedented since Pearl Harbor, that international goodwill has been squandered to near zero. Bin Laden must be beside himself with glee. And the infidels are now walking right into the Iraq trap.

There was always a risk for Bin Laden that worldwide sympathy for the US might thwart his long-term aim of holy war against the Great Satan. He needn't have worried. With the Bush junta at the helm, a camel could have foreseen the outcome. And the beauty is that it doesn't matter what happens in the war.

Imagine how it looks from Bin Laden's swarped point of view...

If the American victory is swift, Bush will have done our work for us, removing the hated Saddam and opening the way for a decent Islamist government. Even better, in 2004 Bush may actually win an election. Who can guess what that swaggering, strutting little pouter-pigeon will then get up to, and what resentments he will arouse, when he finally has something to swagger about? We shall have so many martyrs volunteering, we shall run out of targets. And a slow and bloody American victory would be better still.

The claim that this war is about weapons of mass destruction is either dishonest or betrays a lack of foresight verging on negligence. If war is so vitally necessary now, was it not at least worth mentioning in the election campaigns of 2000 and 2001? Why didn't Bush and Blair mention the war to their respective electorates? The only major leader who has an electoral mandate for

his war policy is Gerhard Schröder - and he is against it. Why did Bush, with Blair trotting faithfully to heel, suddenly start threatening to invade Iraq when he did, and not before? The answer is embarrassingly simple, and they don't even seem ashamed of it. Illogical, even childish, though it is, everything changed on September 11 2001.

Whatever anyone may say about weapons of mass destruction, or about Saddam's savage brutality to his own people, the reason Bush can now get away with his war is that a sufficient number of Americans, including, apparently, Bush himself, see it as revenge for 9/11. This is worse than bizarre. It is pure racism and/or religious prejudice. Nobody has made even a faintly plausible case that Iraq had anything to do with the atrocity. It was Arabs that hit the World Trade Centre, right? So let's go and kick Arab ass. Those 9/11 terrorists were Muslims, right? And Eye-raqs are Muslims, right? That does it. We're gonna go in there and show them some hardware. Shock and awe? You bet.

Bush seems sincerely to see the world as a battleground between Good and Evil, St Michael's angels against the forces of Lucifer. We're gonna smoke out the Amalekites, send a posse after the Midianites, smite them all and let God deal with their souls. Minds doped up on this kind of cod theology have a hard time distinguishing between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Some of Bush's faithful supporters even welcome war as the necessary prelude to the final showdown between Good and Evil: Armageddon followed by the Rapture. We must presume, or at least hope, that Bush himself is not quite of that bonkers persuasion. But he really does seem to believe he is wrestling, on God's behalf,

against some sort of spirit of Evil. Tony Blair is, of course, far more intelligent and able than Bush. But his unshakable conviction that he is right and almost everybody else wrong does have a certain theological feel. He was indignant at Paxman's wickedly funny suggestion that he and Dubya pray together, but does he also believe in Evil?

There are nasty people in every country, stupid people, insane people, people who should never be allowed to get anywhere near power. Just killing nasty people doesn't help: they will be replaced. We must try to tailor our institutions, our constitutions, our electoral systems, so as to minimise the chance that such people will rise to the top. In the case of Saddam Hussein, we in the west must bear some guilt. The US, Britain and France have all, from time to time, done our bit to shore up Saddam, and even arm him. And we democracies might look to our own vaunted institutions. Are they well designed to ensure that we don't make disastrous mistakes when we choose our own leaders? Isn't it, indeed, just such a mistake that has led us to this terrible pass?

The population of the US is nearly 300 million, including many of the best educated, most talented, most resourceful, humane people on earth. By almost any measure of civilised attainment, from Nobel prize-counts on down, the US leads the world by miles. You would think that a country with such resources, and such a field of talent, would be able to elect a leader of the highest quality. Yet, what has happened? At the end of all the primaries and party caucuses, the speeches and the televised debates, after a year or more of non-stop electioneering bustle, who, out of that entire population

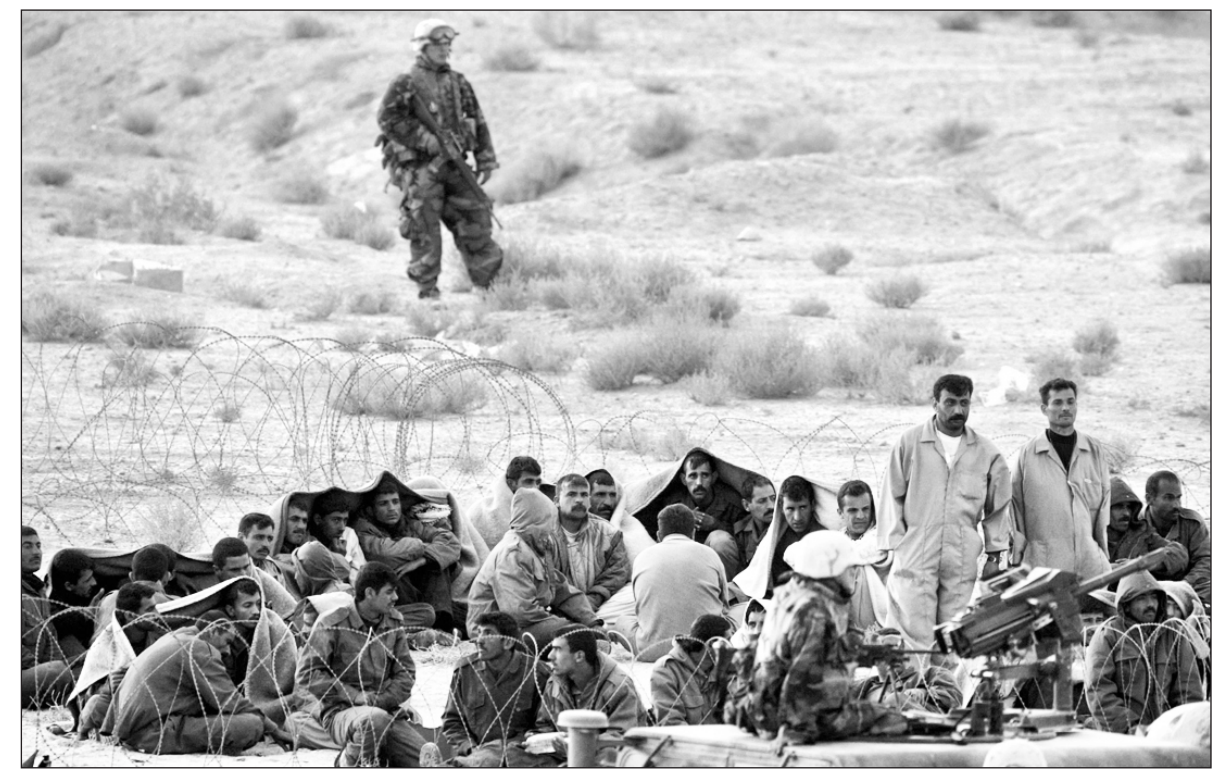
of 300 million, emerges at the top of the heap? George Bush.

Bush isn't quite as stupid as he sounds, and heaven knows he can't be as stupid as he looks. I know most of you didn't vote for him anyway, but that is my point. Forgive my presumption, but could it just be that there is something a teeny bit wrong with that famous constitution of yours? And is it really sensible that money should translate itself so directly and proportionately into electoral success, so that a winning candidate must either be very rich or prepared to sell favours to those who are?

When a company seeks a new chief executive officer, or a university a new vice-chancellor, enormous trouble is taken to find the best person. Professional head-hunting firms are engaged, written references are taken up, exhaustive rounds of interviews are conducted, psychological aptitude tests are administered, confidential positive vetting undertaken. Mistakes are still made, but it is not for want of strenuous efforts to avoid them. Maybe such methods would be undemocratic for choosing the most powerful person on earth, but just think about it. Would you do business with a company that devoted an entire year to little else than the process of choosing its new CEO, from the strongest field in the world, and ended up with Bush?

Saddam Hussein has been a catastrophe for Iraq, but he never posed a threat outside his immediate neighbourhood. George Bush is a catastrophe for the world. And a dream for Bin Laden.

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US soldiers guard Iraqi POWs on the outskirts of the southern Iraqi city of Safwan 22 March 2003. US Gen. Tommy Franks, head of Central Command, said the US-led troops had taken between one and two thousand POWs.  
PHOTO: AFP

## Out with Saddam, in with party politics

MASSIMO CALABRESI, Time magazine

American and British troops were only just beginning to seize parts of Iraq when the jockeying to replace Saddam Hussein began. For years a motley crew of Iraqi exiles, ranging from indicted war criminals to convicted embezzlers, have presented themselves as potential heirs to Saddam, and many have enjoyed American support. Now a new faction aspiring to power in a postwar Iraq has arrived on the scene, and this time it is emerging from within Saddam's regime.

A group of Iraqi elites still inside the country is preparing to announce the formation of a

political movement that is ready to replace Saddam's Baath Party, a US source close to the group tells TIME. Communicating secretly with one another via emissaries over the past six months, the group claims to include a cabinet minister, military officers, university professors, tribal sheiks and other elite members of Iraq's Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish factions. They promise to hand over all weapons of mass destruction, disband the Republican Guard and establish a representative government. Until Saddam's demise, these Iraqis are identifying themselves only as al-Tajammua, Arabic for "the Grouping."

Is al-Tajammua the answer for a post-Saddam Iraq? Not necessarily. Members of the upper

ranks of Iraq's power structure may have been complicit in Saddam's years of rule and may not be the democrats Washington has hoped will succeed Saddam.

"The idea that the US would simply issue orders to the same mob that served under Saddam is ridiculous," Pentagon adviser Richard Perle said last month.

But the State Department and the CIA seem more flexible. The future of Baath Party members, said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, "will depend on the outcome of the conflict, and the actions of individuals in that party who may or may not further the crimes of the regime."

## British press shows horror of attack

AFP, London

A photograph showing two headless Iraqi soldiers in a trench, beside them a white flag was used in several British newspapers on Sunday.

The bodies were discovered by allied troops following an assault in the strategic Fao Peninsula in southern Iraq on Saturday.

For these Iraqi soldiers, their attempt to lay down their weapons came all too late, said the left-wing Sunday Mirror.

"The dead men's white flag of surrender appeared to have been waved too late," said the right-wing Sunday Telegraph in a caption to its front page photograph.

The centre-left Independent on Sunday and the right-leaning Sunday Times published the same photograph without referring to the white flag.

## Extracts from letters published in newspapers worldwide



A German riot police officer (L) chases German doctor Detlef Enge-Bastien (R) as anti-war protesters and riot police look on during a demonstration against US-led war in Iraq. Spangdahlem US Air Force Base, March 22. Doctor Enge-Bastien, protesting against the war, jumped on top of a vehicle of a US military convoy as they tried to enter the base. At right a protester holds a placard with text 'Peace'.  
PHOTO: AFP

**Toronto Star**  
Mohammed Hussain, Edmonton, Canada

For all those who support the American concept of freedom, that is, starve a nation for 12 years and then bomb the same country again, must be questioned about their level of intelligence.

If Saddam Hussein was such a threat to the world, why was he left unharmed in 1990? He was undoubtedly more powerful than he is at the present time.

Those who think that the Iraqis will be thankful to the Americans once this war is over, ought to think again. There is nothing that the Iraqis can be thankful about. Twelve years of sanctions have left 1.5 million people dead, and destroyed the infrastructure of one of the most developed Muslim countries on this planet. They bombed a retreating army and violated the sovereignty of another country by imposing no-fly zones.

The bulk of responsibility lies on the shoulder of the American people. The term Land of the Free certainly holds up. It means America, and no one else has the right to exist freely and make decisions for everyone else in the world.

All Americans must understand that September 11 was in response to American foreign policy. What the Americans are doing in Iraq will only lead to more attacks on the US.

**Gulf News**  
A Reader, Dubai

President Bush and his "poodles" must be feeling very proud of themselves. The new axis of evil (US, Britain and Spain) is plunging the world into a war, endangering the lives of millions of innocent people, causing thousands to lose their jobs due to recession, creating a perfect environment for terrorists to recruit misguided fanatics and ensuring that approximately 10 million Iraqis will be left without food and water (according to the WFP report) and more.

As they sit safely in front of TV screens to watch their shiny new WMD's (which no one else is allowed to have) cause massive destruction, I'm sure their thoughts will be "Yeah - we've done it".

So what, if the world is against this insane exercise; so what, if they have only two other nations with them, do the rest - 160 odd - really matter.

So what, if they are flouting the very regulations that they are attacking another country for, they still style themselves as true upholders of freedom and democracy.

This is pure mockery of international law and policies. America and Britain's permanent membership of the UN should be suspended for five years.

As for regime change, Saddam must go - no doubt about that - but then so must the leaders of countries who prefer war over peace.

**Gulf News**  
THassan, Dubai

The US has invaded Iraq and the war will result in massive destruction and the death of thousands of Iraqis. What are the Arab countries doing about the destruction of their neighbour? They are acting as if the whole thing is of no concern to them.

At the recent Arab summit, a rather tepid statement was issued against the war but the US hardly paid any heed to it. Arab leaders at the summit made us the laughing stock of the world.

Arab countries, particularly in the Gulf, can do a number of things to make the US listen, such as decreasing oil production, cancelling commercial contracts and de-linking their currencies from the dollar.

But none of these have been talked about, let alone put forward as a matter of serious policy.

**Daily News**  
BR Fernando, Sri Lanka

Standing at the receiving end of the information about the current Iraq crisis, I am really confused about the role of the so-called anti-war demonstrators and in need of answers to the following questions:

If the anti-war demonstrators believe that Saddam should stay in power, why has Saddam failed to disarm for more than a decade?

Americans and British citizens protested against Bush and Blair and begged for (so-called) peace, why has no one in Iraq protested against Saddam, asking him to disarm?

Is that Saddam's version of democracy? In the history of mankind, has the world ever won peace by begging in front of a dictator? Would Saddam ever have been expelled from Kuwait if force was not applied?

If the so-called anti-war demonstrators are really interested in peace, why don't they ask Saddam for full disarmament? Or are they more worried about the economic hardship the world may suffer as a result of war, than securing democracy and peace around the world for tomorrow's children?

**Khaleej Times**  
E Fernandez, Dubai

As the American administration is in the silly process of eliminating "French" from their normal vocabulary and daily lives, can someone tell me what they will do with the Statue of Liberty - the symbol of

America?

**Daily Express**  
J Field, Merseyside, England

President Jacques Chirac of France isn't interested in the Iraqi population. His quest is to retain the oil contracts and \$25 billion trade France has with Iraq. The French are not to be trusted; they always walk with one foot on either side of the fence.

**Star Tribune**  
Bethann Barankovich, Minneapolis

On Thursday, the first day of this war, ABC news anchor Peter Jennings reported that American oil companies are preparing to move in and take over the production of Iraq's oil fields. The same day, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld stated that if the Iraqis set their oil fields on fire that he would consider it a war crime.

Sounds to me like we're at war for the oil.

**Star Tribune**  
Chris Hitt, Minneapolis

With anti-war protesters across the globe gathering by the thousands, I'm completely confused by those flaunting their "No blood for oil" or "No war for oil" signs.

Protesting, flooding the streets and preventing the normal flow of traffic mean the people sitting in that traffic are not going anywhere and are therefore burning an excessive amount of gasoline and oil. I wonder if the protesters have bothered to give this any thought.

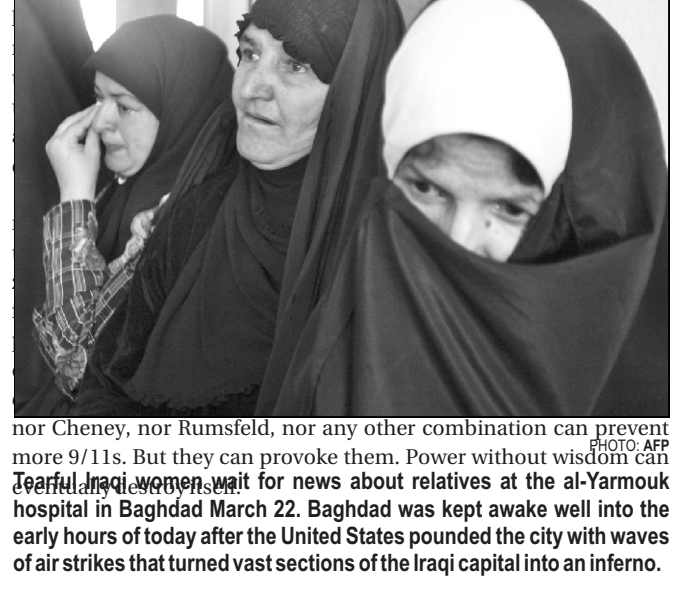
**Star Tribune**  
Phillip Griffin, Golden Valley

The message is loud and clear: Either you "Support our soldiers" or you are a traitor.

I remember it well from the 1960s and 1970s, when it meant giving in to the official story on Vietnam as though the dying and maiming of thousands of human beings were irrelevant. We were told that when we rejected the official story we were forsaking our soldiers who were facing daily death.

When at war, the country must be united, or at least passive, while the leaders make the decisions.

It is strange that, after much of the killing and dying were done, the veterans who came to my university classes did not seem to see it that way. I never had one of them say, "I wish you would have kept quiet



nor Cheney, nor Rumsfeld, nor any other combination can prevent more 9/11s. But they can provoke them. Power without wisdom can be a disaster. Iraqi women wait for news about relatives at the al-Yarmouk hospital in Baghdad March 22. Baghdad was kept awake well into the early hours of today after the United States pounded the city with waves of air strikes that turned vast sections of the Iraqi capital into an inferno.  
PHOTO: AFP

## Iraqi TV shows Saddam Hussein chairing meeting

AFP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein was shown on Iraq television Saturday night meeting with his war council, as Baghdad came under sporadic bombing that appeared to be more targeted strikes on key sites of his regime.

Massive explosions sometimes boomed across the besieged capital and fireballs could be seen on the horizon near Baghdad airport, but there was no sign of the all-out "shock and awe" blitz US and British forces carried out the night before.

Street lights remained on across the city and verses of the Koran blared from neighbourhood mosques. It was not clear if the smoke circling parts of Baghdad came from blazing fuel trenches apparently lit to defy US spy satellites.

With the world wondering about Saddam's fate, state television showed footage of him in military uniform with key figures of the Iraqi leadership -- all of whom, the United States says, will be ousted from power by war's end.

It did not say where or when the meetings were held, but showed him leading a meeting with his son Qusay, Defence Minister Sultan Hashem Ahmed, Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan, Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz and Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf.

It said his aides "voiced satisfaction at the resistance and heroism displayed by the armed forces" since the war began early Thursday, and that the defence minister briefed him on "the situation at the battlefronts."

The broadcast came just before AFP reporters in the Iraqi capital heard a second burst of heavy nighttime bombardment, as coalition warplanes appeared to have gone back to surgical strikes after Friday night's fearsome assault.

## Iraq urges UN to stop 'aggression'

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq has called for the UN Security Council to condemn the US-led "invasion" of its territory and work for an immediate end to war, Iraqi satellite TV reported on Saturday.

"The United Nations should ... condemn this invasion and aggression and act immediately to stop it unconditionally," Iraqi Foreign Minister Najib Sabri wrote in a letter to council president Mamady Traore.

"This large-scale invasion and military aggression against Iraq is a blatant material breach of international law and the UN charter," said the text, which was read out on the satellite channel.

It warned that Saddam Hussein would defeat "the enemies of Islam and civilisation" and "forever bury the dreams of the two rogue colonialist regimes in Washington and London, their lackeys and allies."

"Their plans to colonise the world and subdue it to the will of world Zionism and its representatives in Washington and London will be buried."

The letter also claimed the United States and Britain were guilty of war crimes because, it said, they had not respected their promise not to harm Iraqi civilians.

"The first sites targeted by the US and British aircraft, missiles and artillery were civilians ones," it said.

"These sites included Umm Qasr port, which is the main port for importing humanitarian needs to Iraq, residential areas, schools, hospitals, mosques and churches in the most grotesque crime against humanity and in flagrant violation of international law and the Geneva agreements," it added.